

Family life puts crimp in fitness plans

Never-marrieds more physically active, study finds

MARLENE HABIB
The Canadian Press

Toronto

As a Toronto stock trader, David Stephens is used to fluctuations, including in his exercise habits which tend to ride the tide of his family responsibilities.

Stephens's up-and-down fitness regimen isn't unusual.

A new study concludes family composition plays a large role in whether someone makes exercise a priority.

Those living with a partner or who are widowed, divorced or separated don't exercise as regularly as never-marrieds, says the 1995 survey of about 2,500 adults.

Stephens, 35, was more active after his divorce and before his second marriage and the birth of his first child, when he cut back somewhat to fit in fatherly duties.

After working up to more regular exercise, he plans to put his fitness membership at the Plaza Club in downtown Toronto on hold after his second child is born, and work out more at home.

"For the first month or so after the baby is born I want to make sure my wife is comfortable before I take off for work in the morning," said Stephens, who'd leave his home in Aurora, Ont., and hit the gym about 6:15 a.m. before heading to the brokerage firm Scotia McLeod.

A third active

The survey, conducted by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute in Ottawa, sug-



The Canadian Press

Spirit Synott says exercise helps put life in perspective

gests about a third of Canadians are active only twice a week or less. That's well below the recommended level of at least every other day, for a

minimum of 30 minutes, at a moderate intensity or greater to gain important health benefits.

Of the 2,500 assessed for their

HOW TO FIT IN FITNESS

Some tips for fitting exercise into the day, even despite family pressures:

- Devise a simple bending and stretching routine. Do it while you brush your teeth, watch TV or wait for water to boil.
- Dust, vacuum and wash windows regularly.
- Shovel, don't blow, the snow.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Go for a lunchtime stroll.
- Dance vigorously, and often.
- Take public transportation and walk whenever possible, to work, on errands, around town.
- Use vacations to try out new activities, then add them to your routine when you get home.

Source: The book *Active Living: The Miracle Medicine for a Long and Healthy Life* by Gord Stewart (Human Kinetics, \$19.50).

exercise habits and intentions, about 58 per cent of never-marrieds were active at least every other day, compared with 54 per cent of men and women with partners, and 42 per cent who are widowed, divorced or separated.

Younger adults and men tend to exercise more often than older adults and women, researchers noted. And since never-marrieds are typically much younger than those who've married, they're usually more active.

Time constraints

Exercise habits often hinge on time constraints — even many post-marrieds still cope with kids and added work pressures because of increased financial burden.

But fitness experts argue that family responsibilities don't have to interfere with being active.

Even many people who are extremely busy with family, work and social obligations still find time to exercise, says Montreal sports psychologist James Gavin in his book *The Exercise Habit* (Leisure Press, \$17.50). Once they've developed an exercise habit, they wouldn't dream of dropping out because

exercise helps keep their lives in balance.

Spirit Synott, a never-married Toronto freelance artist, writer and actor, says exercise has helped put her life in perspective.

Although she's lost the use of her legs, Synott, 31, works out nearly daily, including five-kilometre wheelchair races, stretching, weight training, kayaking and other outdoor activities. And she only dates men who are also activity-oriented.

"Despite my independence, I need someone in good shape who can do these activities with me. I'd be most attracted to a man who can live an active life with me."

Gavin recommends getting more practical about exercise, rather than just leaving it out when work and family pressures build.

"Exercise doesn't have to mean going to the health club for two hours a day," he writes. "It can be 15 minutes of t'ai chi in the morning and another 15 minutes before bedtime. Or it can be walking to work instead of taking the bus."

"If push comes to shove, so to speak, you can always find the time."